Over charging by PCOs

†*364. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that PCOs in the country are charging at old rates even now;

(b) if so, whether Government are going to take any steps to check this; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) A few cases have come to the notice where PCO booth operators were found using locally programmed charge indicators which is not permitted, which could have led to overcharging. Instructions have been issued to field units to carry out surprise checks of PCOs to ensure that PCO operators do not over charge the customers. Action, including disconnection, is taken against defaulters.

Transit of foodgrains

†*365. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the agriculture experts have demanded Government for immediate repeal of the Essentia' Commodities Act, with a view to providing for unhindered transit of foodgrains in the country;

(b) whether such demands had also been made previously;

(c) if so, what are the reasons for not repealing the same; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(d) the action taken by Government on the demands raised by the experts?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR): (a) and (b) An expert Committee on Strengthening and Developing of Agricultural Marketing was set up by Government in the Ministry of Agriculture in December, 2000. The Committee in its report dated 29th June, 2001 recommended that the Essential Commodities Act, 19S5 under which restrictions have been imposed on storage and free movement of stocks, should be repealed to make way for play of free market forces in the real sense.

(c) A standing Committee of some Union Ministers and Chief Ministers has been set up to look into issues relating to food management and agricultural exports. One of the issues identified was "Review of the Essential Commodities Act and Control Orders to ensure free movement of agricultural products". The Committee has suggested that the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 may continue as an umbrella legislation for the Centre and the States to use when needed, but a progressive dismantling of controls and restrictions was also required.

(d) The Central Government have issued an Order under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 allowing dealers to freely buy, stock, sell, transport, distribute, dispose, etc. any quantity in respect of wheat, paddy/rice, coarse grains, sugar, edible oilseeds and edible oils without requiring any license or permit therefor under any order issued under the Act. The Order took effect after thirty days from the date of its issue (15.2.2002) notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any Order made by a State Government before the commencement of the Order.